

# **CRANSTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING**

**WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2005**

**WILLIAM A. BRIGGS BUILDING**

**845 PARK AVENUE**

**EXECUTIVE SESSION: 5:00 P.M.**

**PUBLIC WORK SESSION: 7:00 P.M.**

**PLEASE NOTE:** The School Committee Work Session scheduled for November 9, 2005 has been re-scheduled to November 16, 2005. The agenda is as follows.

## **MINUTES**

**I. Call to order and convene to Executive Session pursuant to RI State Laws 42-46-5(a)(1) personnel and 42-46-5(a)(2) contract and litigation.**

**Let it be duly noted that the Executive Session scheduled to be held on this date and time was not held. The Cranston School Committee conducted only the public work session.**

**A public work session of the Cranston School Committee was held on the evening of the above date in the William A. Briggs Building Reed Conference Room with the following members present: Mrs. Greifer, Mr. Lupino, Mr. Stycos and Mr. Traficante. Mr. Archetto, Ms. Iannazzi, and Mr. Palumbo were absent with cause. Also present were Mr. Scherza, Mrs. Campbell, Mr. Scaffardi, and Mr. Laliberte and**

**representatives from Connect-ED.**

**The work session was called to order at 7:03 p.m. The roll was called.**

# **1. Update on the Rhode Island Department of Education Diploma System Requirements**

**Mrs. Jean Campbell, Mr. Norman Laliberte and Mr. Robert Scaffardi made a presentation to the committee.**

**Mr. Scaffardi stated to the committee that this is an awareness and update session on Rhode Island's newly revised diploma system. The district must update its district policy which will be mentioned later as it affects the class of 2008. All of the comments being made at this session all affect just the class of 2008.**

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**Mr. Scaffardi went on to say that over the past couple of years this diploma system has been evolving fluid because it is in a changeable state. There has been a lot of verbiage all referring to the same kinds of things. People have heard high school reform, high school regulations, high school mandates, and secondary reform. The State**

has crystallized all of those areas under the umbrella of “The Rhode Island High School Diploma System.” From now on, everyone should try to use that same verbiage so that no one will be confused in thinking that these are all separate things. They have used it as an umbrella term to put everything else underneath it. The guiding philosophy is that the districts are under the mandate to have students recall what they know, what they do, and to face the challenges of the 21st Century. All high school graduates must demonstrate that they are proficient in standards based content as well as applied learning skills, and that the support systems are in place that the district must have to help them achieve that.

They have tried to piece together for the committee under one umbrella to have it make sense and talk about some of the things the district will be facing. These are all state reforms. This is being separated from the No Child Left Behind Act.

Mrs. Campbell made a Power Point presentation to the committee. A copy of this Power Point is attached for the record. Please click on <http://cpsed.net/schcom/diploma.ppt>

In her comments, Mrs. Campbell stated that one of the things they have tried to do in the policy that they are presenting is to take a look at where the district is and where it needs to be. It is extremely important to recognize that this is a work in progress. It is a work in progress because the Department of Education is continually

updating what needs to be done based on the results that they get from different aspects.

Mrs. Campbell detailed what was contained in the committee's information packet. There was a copy of the brochure that summarized the requirements of the Rhode Island High School Diploma System. It explained what the district has to do and what the students for 2008 would have to do in order to be able to get endorsed diplomas from the RI Department of Education. The packet contained a policy as it currently exists. This policy dates back to 1972, and this is the policy that will be updated.

Mr. Traficante referred to Mrs. Campbell's remarks regarding the participation in the end-of-course assessments and asked her to explain it further. She noted that there are two parts. One is a district-wide part, and as an example, if it were mathematics, a portion of the exam was put together by all of the teachers who teach mathematics. All of the teachers who teach Algebra I got together with the

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department chair people and the program supervisors, and they went through all of the skills and the requirements that are necessary to show proficiency at the end of Algebra I. They came to a consensus as to what would be on that portion of the exam. All of those

questions are exactly the same throughout the entire school district. The second part is teacher designed. There may be a particular teacher for whatever reason that saw that their students may have been deficient in something, and he or she spent some length of time on that. They could give an applied project whereby students would be using formulas and applying those formulas. Another teacher may take a construction project and decide to have kids design and develop something, and that would count for 50%. It would not be a written type exam; it would be performance based.

With regard to the Carnegie Units required for graduation, Mrs. Campbell stressed that in the past the minimum required was nineteen, and now they have to earn a minimum of twenty Carnegie Units for graduation. She emphasized that this is the minimum required. The majority of the students graduate with anywhere from twenty-five to twenty-seven Carnegie Units.

With regard to the Proficiency Based Requirements, Mr. Traficante asked who would determine what a student can do to prove their proficiency for their portfolio, and Mrs. Campbell indicated that a student in music might show that they are proficient at playing the piano by actually video taping a recital and making that be a part of their digital portfolio. The proficiency rate is 80 or better. There are rubrics that are designed. The teachers in each of the core content areas, English, Science, Math, the Arts, and Social Studies design projects or particular work that the students need to complete. They

provide them with rubrics, and those rubrics are measured against the school wide expectations. At Cranston East, a student must earn a 4 on a 6 point rubric for something to be able to go into their proficiency portfolio. At West, they are functioning on a 4 point rubric, and in order for it to go into the portfolio, they must earn a 3 or better on it. Young people have an opportunity to redo their work if they do not meet the standard. There is opportunity for everyone to meet the criteria.

Mr. Laliberte summarized Mrs. Campbell's remarks to the committee. He indicated that although there are four different requirements, students are already taking the state assessments so they are involved in that. The other additional parts are the additional Carnegie Unit which is being offered to the students. There is the additional element of having the students show what they know and apply what they know and giving common assessments. Most of the district's program supervisors have led their different groups in creating the common assessments. The applied portion should not necessarily be a written portion. For example, in foreign language, the common assessment might be a written portion on a foreign language exam, but the actual performance would be sitting

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down with the teacher and speaking the language they have been studying. The whole idea of using more than just the nineteen

Carnegie Units to graduate is the fact that the State wants multiple measures. They don't want students to be measured by just one. They want multiple measures to show students being able to handle the work. As Mrs. Campbell had mentioned, the last time the district's diploma policy was changed was 1972, but more changes are on the horizon. Although they are asking the committee to look at this and approve this policy so that they can go forward, there are other changes. They will be coming back with amendments from time to time. It may be two or three amendments within the next two to three years. One of the things that is on the horizon is that when the science test comes out in 2008, it will almost require three years of science which is currently not required. The district will require a third year of science, and that will cause a change in the current policy.

The State is saying that they are leaving the definition of what is technologically proficient and what is proficient in the arts up to each district. Right now if a student takes a half credit of art, the district is considering the student proficient. There will come a time when the district will have to define exactly how it will give credit to a student in art before he or she shows proficiency. Other changes that accompany this work are that the district is in the process of changing the program of studies. That will have to change to reflect the changes that are being put into effect here and also the student handbooks have to be changed so that they will know up front. Ninth and tenth graders have already been told, but they need to have it in

**writing all the time so they can see what is required of them.**

**Mr. Laliberte went on to say that in the future the district will have to develop pathways for students. They will have to show them that there are multiple pathways to getting their high school diploma. There are basics that everyone will have to do, but there are different ways they can pursue it. Mr. Laliberte explained the various ways it could be done.**

**The other piece the State mentions but has not said that it has to be done is the whole work study piece which is giving some students credit for what they are doing outside of school and giving them school credit for it because they are able to show their proficiency in a work setting. Mr. Laliberte told the committee to expect some other changes soon.**

**Mr. Traficante commented that at the Charter School the students do a lot of work outside the curriculum. He asked if the students would get credit for it, and Mr. Laliberte said that they would get credit for their work. Mr. Traficante referred to an earlier conversation he had with Mr. Scaffardi who said that the Department of Education is in the mode of re-thinking some of these policies and also adding**

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**new things. He asked what other areas they are looking into or**



possibly wanting to add to these mandates. Mr. Scaffardi responded that his comments referred more to what they have asked the districts to do when they ask them to implement them. The procedure of implementation seems to change. Since it is the first time around for them, the State will begin to adjust their requirements within it. The information given to the committee tonight will not change, but the process and how it is implemented will be tweaked along the way.

Mr. Traficante asked where common planning time, personalization, and literacy all fall because they are all mandates. Mr. Scaffardi responded that they all fall under the supplementary piece. He referred to the orange folder distributed to the committee which puts it all together. They have labeled and tied everything together so that it all makes sense. Mr. Traficante asked that while RIDE is referring to this diploma policy were they speaking in terms of funding these mandates. Mr. Scaffardi responded that to his knowledge there is no funding at all. Their comments to the district when they ask about funding is, and he noted that the State is implementing what the Legislature passed, for the district to re-deploy their current resources. There is not much else they can tell the districts; they have offered their personal assistance to much of this. Mr. Lupino added that they are not relaxing existing mandates; they are adding on without relaxing the present ones. Senator Gallo had a bill last year that said that they would like to identify a mandate with the funding source along with it. Mr. Scaffardi remarked that one of the

implementation dates has been changed, so they are very short on limitation times for many of these things. For a large district such as Cranston it is very difficult to implement these things in a way that will be effective. Mr. Laliberte added that at the same time at the federal level they are discussing a reduction to Title I, Title II, Title IV, and Title III funds which are right now areas where this district gets those extras, those support systems that they put in place are funded out of those grants. Mr. Traficante indicated that the No Child Left Behind Act is being challenged in several states. Hopefully those states will come out ahead, and he asked what would happen to Rhode Island and if there would be any impact at all. Mr. Scaffardi responded that there probably wouldn't be any impact. He couldn't see the state mandates changing as a result of it.

Mr. Stycos referred to the earlier comments made by Mr. Traficante regarding the internships. He indicated that this would be a case where it was a part of the curriculum at the Charter School. He asked if there was any thought of having programs at the other schools. He asked what the process looks like for that. Mr. Laliberte responded that a lot of it would take the lines of the types that have been done in vocational schools. There are students involved in work study programs, and they are getting credit for some of that work study. Mr. Stycos asked what a typical work study would be like. Mr. Laliberte responded that a

student may be shadowing an engineer, a banker, and those kinds of things where a student would be required to do particular things and learn about the skills of the person they are shadowing. Mr. Stycos asked when that would be likely to happen and what the process is for doing it for a non-vocational student. Mr. Laliberte felt it would start with vocational students and the arts. For a lot of students who are studying the arts outside of school, they can already demonstrate their proficiency in either the visual arts or the performing arts. That is where it will begin, and it will grow from there. It will take at least three to five years to take hold and for systems to build up to be able to do that.

Mrs. Campbell added that at Cranston East and Cranston West during the latter part of January and February students are matched up for a shadowing experience. The difference right now is that they don't receive any type of credit for it. It is an experience that they opt to take. There may be a student who may be in advanced math or physics, and suddenly realized that he or she would like to be an engineer. The student would have a conversation with their guidance counselor, and there are several engineering firms in Cranston alone that are willing to take young people on. It may be that the student comes out of the math or physics class, or if they are on an abbreviated schedule, they may be able to go on a Tuesday or Thursday afternoon and spend the afternoon actually in the engineering firm. They would be learning on site. The only difference

right now is that they don't get credit. As the district moves into the future, the students would be receiving some type of credit for spending that amount of time. Mr. Stycos added that the Met School does something more intense where two days a week they don't go to school but are serving their internship. Mr. Laliberte added that if a student takes a child development course in Family and Consumer Science they will go out once or twice a week and work within the district's school working with young children so that whole idea is going to expand. Mr. Stycos asked Mr. Laliberte if this was something he would be in charge of, and Mr. Laliberte responded that they haven't worked it out; but it does come under Mr. Scaffardi and himself. Mr. Stycos asked if the district would have a program to expand that or waiting for awhile to change the names of some of the things they are doing. Mr. Scaffardi remarked that unless there is guidance coming out from the State, the district can't look that far. Generally speaking, the district waits for the State's guidance because sometimes when the district plans ahead the difference comes out with a different set of rules at the last minute that it has to be done differently. Mr. Laliberte added that in Cranston's case when they have gone ahead and done what they had to do, the State has used Cranston's programs that they have developed as the model for the rest of the State.

Mr. Stycos referred to the required twenty Carnegie Units and asked if the district could go higher than that. Mr. Laliberte indicated that twenty is the minimum

required. Mr. Lupino added that if the district does increase the requirement, it equates to more staff. Mrs. Campbell commented that it could increase the staff, but if it went to twenty-one credits, it would mean re-allocating the staff based on student selection. A high school principal would have to look to see that because of the three math credits a student may decide to take may require more math teachers but he won't need as many social studies teachers. It is not going to necessarily mean an increase in staffing, but it will mean a re-allocation of staff with varying certifications based on demand. That is why they go through the course selection process in order to be able to make a projection about where they are going to need more staff, where they won't need more staff, and how they are going to re-allocate it. Each principal would look to see where on their staff people have multiple certifications. Rather than having to lay someone off in one area, they may be able to allocate the services to another area. Mr. Laliberte cautioned that the further the district gets away from the minimum, remembering that the district is servicing a wide group of youngsters on a long educational continuum; it could make it very difficult to require too many Carnegie Units in order to graduate. Some students may feel that they can't make it or the district may have to provide additional services in order for them to do it. Mr. Scaffardi commented that the key is to develop rigor in what they do. Mr. Lupino added that the answer might be to

encourage but not to require. Mrs. Campbell noted that administration does encourage each student to take a minimum of five classes each and every year. In the schedules at each of the high schools, there are seven opportunities; therefore, seven times four would obtain twenty-eight credits. The majority of the students graduate with anywhere from twenty-five to twenty-seven credits. Mrs. Greifer felt that there would be a risk that as the district increases the rigor of what they already have, to increase the number of units that a child needs to graduate, there is a certain percentage of students who would find it impossibly challenging and will leave the system all together because they can't achieve the goal. Mrs. Campbell also noted that every student must have an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) where he or she is in special education or not. In reality, if there is a student with a disability or has been classified as a special needs student, he or she would have the curriculum accommodated through the IEP process (Individualized Education Plan). The students who are having difficulty in the reading area have PLP's (Personal Learning Plan). Each and every student will sit down through that advisory teacher and plan with their advisory teacher and again with their guidance counselor and develop their plan. The students will establish a personal learning goal, a professional goal, and in addition, a post-secondary goal. The students will visit this on a yearly basis and basically be able to see how it has changed from ninth, to tenth, and at the end of eleventh grade he or she is deciding what college they want to go to and what they want to study. They will have had the internships and the shadowing experiences in the

fields to be able to see what they might like to do and what they won't like to do.

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Mr. Traficante stated that the district is going to accomplish the ILP, the PLP, adding math classes and science classes with re-allocation of funds. It sounds typical of the State of Rhode Island.

Mr. Lupino indicated that the high school diploma policy is going to be not only a policy of requirements for the students but a policy requirement for the district. Mrs. Campbell said that it most definitely would be. Mr. Lupino asked if Charter Schools were required to follow this, and Mr. Traficante said that they were required. Mr. Lupino asked about students who are home schooled, and Mr. Scherza responded that the student would still have to achieve the appropriate number of credits, but the way in which they do it is independent of school. It can be done through a purchased curriculum or in an acceptable curriculum that has been devised by the parents. The parents have to submit it for approval to administration in advance. Administration has to verify that their curriculum is essentially and substantially the same curriculum as the district would be covering.

Mr. Lupino asked how deep into specific areas this would get and asked when basic skills come in such as balancing a checkbook,

knowing what the landlord-tenant relationship is, because he didn't see any of those things mentioned. Mrs. Campbell referred to the twenty Carnegie Units and pointed out the areas that need to be addressed. A student can choose to get the checkbook experience or to get the tenant experience by taking a class. When looking at the curriculum guide, it would be aligned with the grade span expectations for mathematics in the Business Department, and thereby taking a course such as Quicken or Business Law would satisfy something like that. The district at the present time does not have a class that is designed as basic skills that all students must take. That may be something down the road that the district can consider as they are looking at the grade span expectations for English Language Arts and mathematics that would come to the table by one of the program supervisors in the proposal form.

Mr. Lupino asked how the requirements would affect the district's program with regard to advanced placement, college prep, and comprehensive. Mrs. Campbell replied that everyone will meet the same exact requirements. Mr. Laliberte further explained that the district is in the process of re-writing the program of studies. It will be very clearly spelled out what this course is designed to do, and the courses most likely be called college prep and comprehensive; it will be that all courses are to prepare students beyond high school beyond secondary education. The course will spell out if it is something to prepare for college or something needed to get into a college or something a student would be taking for the purposes of



getting into a particular vocation or a job role or a course to get into a two-year college or a technical college. That is

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one of the biggest parts of re-writing the program of studies so that every student has the opportunity. Every student has to have equal access to the span of courses that are offered.

Mr. Lupino commented that for the college bound student this might be replacing a portion of the SAT as a requirement for entry into college. Mr. Laliberte indicated that there won't be much change for those students who are taking college preparatory curriculum. The biggest changes will come for those students who are not taking college preparatory classes.

Mr. Lupino referred to draft policy No. 5123 revised and stated that it was the same with regard to promotion. He was under the impression that in order to retain a student it had to be Okayed by the parent. The last paragraph indicates that the parent will be contacted in advance although the final decision will be left to the school authorities. Mrs. Campbell noted that this was the same as in the old policy. Mr. Lupino asked if the parent gets to choose if the child is socially promoted or not. He mentioned that a child is in first grade and the teacher has stated that the child would benefit from being in first grade for another year. The parent indicates that he or she

doesn't want the child retained, and he thought that would be the final word. This policy says something different. Mr. Laliberte explained that at the elementary level they are encouraged not to retain students because enough support should be provided so that they can move on. At the high school level, the retention does become part of the principal and the parent. Mr. Lupino indicated that this then would not carry over to elementary.

Mr. Traficante referred to the non-college bound student, and indicated that in the past the district has broken up Algebra into two parts, Algebra I part 1 and part 2, and the same thing holds true for Algebra II. He asked if it would count for a math course of study even though Algebra I in itself is a course of study. Mrs. Campbell responded that as long as the student took it all year, he or she would get credit for Algebra I part 1 and the same for Algebra I part 2.

Mrs. Greifer indicated that it seemed to her that if the promotion policy applied to only high school it should say so. Mr. Lupino said that his original document doesn't say that, but the draft does. The 1972 document does not state high school, but the draft does state it. Mr. Lupino asked Mr. Scherza to look at both policies so that when the committee votes on it, they will be voting on the proper situation. He indicated that he would like two separate policies.

Mr. Traficante asked if the classes of 2008 and 2009 were on track with this program, and Mrs. Campbell said that they were. Mr. Lupino

added that the class of 2008 will require a minimum of twenty credits and by the end of their senior year they will have forty. They will need thirty to get into their junior year.

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The tenth graders at East have ten artifacts and ten reflections from the ninth grade already. Last year was the pilot year for Cranston West. Mr. Lupino asked if any students are in jeopardy of not having it, and Mr. Laliberte indicated that the district is providing summer programs for those students to upgrade their portfolios.

Mr. Stycos referred to the second page of the draft policy concerning social studies credits for US History. Mr. Scherza explained that according to state statute one credit must be in US History. He asked if any thought had been given to the second credit being in a current events related course. Mrs. Campbell said that she had heard nothing about that, but there has been some discussion regarding the fact that there was consideration that the second credit be given for civics. As they furthered their discussions, civics is in the US History class and is part of that content. Since two are required, one being US History, it gives the student an opportunity to select with the guidance counselor and parents what they would like to take. Mr. Stycos indicated that the college prep track student is encouraged to take two years of World History and then the American history. Mrs. Campbell responded that an honor student would take a minimum of three, and if they were considering an Ivy League college, they would

take four.

Mr. Stycos indicated that he was under the impression that next year there wouldn't be any study halls in the high schools because they wanted more instructional time. Mr. Stycos asked if the district was operating on the assumption that a student could fail eight courses during a student's high school career and still obtain their diploma. Mr. Scherza responded that according to state requirements that would be the case. In Cranston, they have set their bar higher. He asked if some students would have the mindset that they would not have to pass some classes because they only need twenty credits to graduate. In the past, they could go to a study hall and get some work done. Mr. Lupino remarked that education is becoming geared toward the middle of the road average student. It may be the reality in some districts where they won't pass. Mrs. Campbell stated that in reading a lot of the literature it comes down to how the district can support the student to be successful. Although many of the students won't be in study halls, they will be in situations that are supportive in nature. If a student is deficient in writing skills, he or she, rather than reporting to a study hall, could report to a writing lab for support in that particular area. All of these things are being discussed in order that they can be designed for the students who cannot go through six or seven periods a day even though there is a seven period day at both high schools. Some students physically and emotionally cannot handle six or seven periods a day. There needs to be something for the student that would be supportive in nature so that the district

would be supporting their success. Mr. Stycos added that it won't necessarily be seven classes; it will be seven periods of some type of academics. Mrs.

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Campbell commented that it could be academics, and for some students it will be academic support; for others it could be enriched electives depending upon what they need. Portfolio may become a half year class. It will be supportive of the Individualized Learning Plan.

Mr. Stycos referred back to the social studies program and asked if there is a policy written to this effect, and Mr. Laliberte responded that it is written in the curriculum and also in the program of studies. Because most students would be taking the two parts of world history and American history, it doesn't necessarily mean that they have to take both world histories. Mr. Stycos stated that he felt that current events is more important than world history. For the honors student who comes into ninth grade, he or she is basically told that every honors student will take world history. They are not told that they can take social studies, current events, etc. It is set up so that one year they take world history, then American history, and then if they have time in their schedule, they can take current events, psychology, or sociology. By the time they get to be seniors, many of these students don't have any room in their schedules, and his bias

is that their time be better spent as freshmen and sophomores in a current events class learning what is going on in the world today rather than about the Crusades. Mr. Scherza added that there is nothing that precludes, after the five core courses that are recommended, students from taking electives, two social studies in a given year. They could take a world history and a current events potentially. Mr. Stycos asked who is channeling these students in the ninth grade. Mr. Scherza responded that a lot of it is the counseling function with the parents as well. The parents have to sign the course of study selection sheet. Mr. Stycos commented that at Cranston East in order to get into the current events course the student had to be a senior or the senior student would get preference over the underclassmen. Teaching to a senior and teaching to a freshman is very different. Mrs. Greifer asked if the recommendations for the course selection that are made to the students by guidance might not be driven by what guidance understands colleges are looking for. If a student wants to get into a certain level college, they may be expecting a student to have certain courses. Mrs. Campbell commented that in Cranston they try to guide students because many of them who come into ninth grade do have not have college aspirations. The guidance counselor tries between ninth, tenth, and eleventh grade, when the student comes back as an eleventh grader, he or she indicates that they want to go to college. The ninth and tenth graders are in a particular sequence that will enable them to go on to a two or four-year college should by the eleventh grade they changed their minds and all of a sudden they

decide they want to go to college. If the district enables students just to pick classes at random without any sequence to them, the student could take a ton of classes that would be totally unrelated and really not prepare them to go into the world of work or to be eligible for a two or four-year college. That is one of the reasons sequence takes place

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in the way that it does. Mr. Stycos stated that he didn't think this held water in the social studies area. Mrs. Campbell indicated that at the present time there are seven electives from which the students can choose to be able to take current events, and when the twenty Carnegie Units go into place, there would be eight slots for a student to select whether he or she wanted to take a current events class or not. Current events not only come up under current events but also they come up in the English curriculum. It may not come up on a daily basis, but it does come up in the English curriculum as far as a student's writing. It is something that the district could definitely take a look at.

Mr. Traficante asked who instructs the students to develop a portfolio. Mrs. Campbell responded that at the present time it is done a little differently at both schools. At Cranston West, the charge is currently being led by Lynn Burke. She set up all of the equipment for the hardware and the software. There are people from multiple departments that have one teaching class assigned as proficiency

portfolio. Because they have one class, they meet with five different groups of young people that they are responsible for, and that is how they are filtering through the proficiency portfolio. At Cranston East, the proficiency portfolio is embedded into the curriculum so each and every teacher is responsible for two projects. Each teacher takes those students that he or she has and they upload the proficiency projects together. They have labs open after school so that if students want to come, they come with specific work that indicates that the work has been deemed proficient and can go into the portfolio. Work cannot be uploaded from home but only uploaded from specific computer labs under supervision. The teachers took PDI courses in order to be able to do this.

Mrs. Campbell, Mr. Scaffardi, and Mr. Laliberte left the public work session.

## **2. School-to-Parent Communication System**

Mr. Peter McManus, Mr. Brendan Carter and Mr. Joseph Nelson, representing Notification Technologies made a presentation to the School Committee regarding their product Connect-ED. Mrs. Joany Santa, Principal of Barrows School, was also present for this presentation.

Mr. McManus stated that Connect-Ed is a school-to-parent service or



vehicle that allows the superintendent, principal, or designated person to leave a personalized message in their own voice from a cell phone, a home phone, or an office phone. In a matter of minutes, that call can be sent to thousands of parents of students in the school system. There are over 3,500 school districts in the Country that on board with this system. There is a significant market share in

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the New England area, and they are making presentations to the tune of one or two per day. The groundswell of activity in Rhode Island is significant.

Mr. McManus made a Power Point presentation to the committee outlining how the product works and the types of communication vehicles available to the district. He noted that there are four basic forms of communications. The most commonly used communication for this product is community outreach particularly when a superintendent would want to leave a message for the parents about a back-to-school event coming up. It may be telling parents that fourth grade students have testing tomorrow morning, and it is important that they have a good night sleep and eat a healthy breakfast. There are thousands of examples of the districts that are using Connect-ED now for the community outreach component. 90% of the calls made with Connect-Ed are for community outreach.

Attendance messages are a key component to the product. It allows the school district and the school themselves to communicate to the parents early in the day if there is an unexcused absence so that the parent can communicate with the child if there is no excuse for this absence to get the child back in school. This type of message is sent to different phone numbers, and in many cases the parents ask that this message go to their cell phone. In case they are at work, they can get the message immediately so that action can be taken. Emergency communication is the least used but is the most powerful in terms of why school districts are using this program. A district in Massachusetts had a Columbine incident, and that superintendent was able to leave a message with all the parents informing them of the situation. He did it so efficiently that he beat the children who had cell phones who called their parents. This superintendent was able to calm the parents down telling them not to come to the school and that he would update them as things changed. The following day this incident was on Good Morning America. A new feature of this product is the single survey which allows the principal or superintendent to survey his or her audience on a particular event or decision that has to be made. Mr. McManus elaborated on this feature of the system.

Mr. McManus elaborated on the various uses of this system. Mr. Scherza mentioned that the district was changing to the school max program, and Mr. Carter indicated that the district would have no problem corresponding school max to their program. His company

works with over twenty-five different student information systems nationwide.

Mr. Scherza asked Mr. McManus if this system would give a list of undeliverable messages in order for the school district to clear their database or to notify the district of those families who had moved, and Mr. McManus said that it would. Mr. Stycos commented that Cranston East has a similar system, and Mr. Lupino noted that there have been problems with that system. Mr. Carter explained

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how the present system at Cranston East works. The challenges with that particular system is that it is hardware based, there are software issues, there are phone lines and code issues to deal with, and there are speed issues to deal with. This is located in one locality, and if there is a flood or fire or some type of evacuation from a building, it becomes obsolete in terms of its effectiveness. The second type is a web based product that connects to multiple auto dialers in a location. The problem is that the district would be basing the performance of this system on one locality. The district cannot control how local traffic comes into a local community either via the analog home lines or digital PBX in business or even cell phones. The last type of technology which Connect-Ed is on which is part of the nationwide grid that they have is intelligent network. It operates across the three major power grids nationwide, and it operates on

multiple redundant and mirrored servers. It also operates based upon many different clusters in terms of carriers. It has throttle control and intelligence which means that he can put out a fire hose, but if that local exchange can't accept a fire hose, it will flood out the system. He can downgrade or upgrade the flow of calls coming into a local exchange based on what the hardware can handle. That is significant when a district wants to put out a message that is critical information or emergency situation where speed counts. It is approximately 1,000 plus calls per minute. He noted that each student record can hold up to six phone numbers. Auto dialers were good many years ago, but now everyone lives in a time where parents are mostly working, have cell phones, or the district has to move very quickly because there is an issue, the press may be involved in a situation, or the children all have mobility in terms of cell phones; and the district wants to communicate and control that communication to the intended audience as quickly and as effectively as possible. Mr. Lupino noted that the calls would go to the home line, and the students were home any way. Mr. McManus also commented that the parents would receive the phone call at the end of the day when it would affect that child's attendance.

Mr. Carter explained the chronology of messages that have gone out regarding one student to his or her parents or guardians. A level of accountability has been added to the communication site that is very different from what the common culture is today of letters, back pack memos, copies, half sheets, and color sheets. This information can

be accessed from a secure environment on Notification.com, typing in the user name and password from any place one has access to the internet, be it home, school, or business. Mr. Lupino asked if this system was secure, and Mr. Carter responded that it is very secure. It has 3,500 school districts nationwide. This company has the majority of the market place in Massachusetts. Mr. Lupino asked if an ex MIT student could hack into this system and access information. Mr. Carter responded that it was possible, but he felt that the company had gone through enough security audits third party wise, and they have gone through enough planning process to serve the

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audience they have. They have successfully gone through the 2005 winter season with millions of calls from across the country in terms of snow belt areas. They have gone through the hurricanes lately, and there is a lot of data that has been replicated many times. There are many security documents that talk about their structure or infrastructure or support and backup to that. Mr. Lupino noted that security of the system is very important to him. Mr. Carter responded that information in a school system has a much greater chance of being compromised than it is having a web based application. They would be taking resources from a national basis to have the best available security type of technology on the market because it is a distributive cost model versus a 10X or 20X which the district could do alone as a single school district in terms of security levels.

Mrs. Greifer noted that during the presentation she saw where one message was sent out in Spanish. She asked what languages were available since many languages were spoken by parents in Cranston. Mr. McManus responded that there was no limit to the languages that messages can be sent out in. As sub-groups are created, a person can pull all Spanish-speaking families to create a sub-group. Whatever the language is, it can be accomplished. Mrs. Greifer asked if the school district would have to provide all of the translations or if it would be sent in English. Mr. McManus indicated that the district would create the sub-group, and other than English, the district would provide a person who speaks a particular language to recite the message. Mr. Carter indicated that Central Falls was the first school district to go with this program in Rhode Island, and they had a challenge of communicating with the Spanish speaking population. They had low attendance at many of their parent involved events. The first use of the product had a message where an administrator spoke in English and one spoke in Spanish. That went out to 4,000 parents twenty-four hours before the event. They had record attendance at that event because it was the first time that they were able to deliver a message in a natural voice in native tongue to both of those audiences. They also have the capability of doing a text to speech message either in English or Spanish automatically. That is utilized more toward attendance related calls than general outreach or emergency calls.

Mrs. Greifer asked if there were any other Rhode Island districts

using this system, and Mr. Carter said that Providence and East Providence were using it. Mr. Lupino noted that Barrows School is presently using Connect-ED. Mrs. Santa indicated that she has used the system approximately twelve times since having it installed at the school. She went on to say that this system is working well, and she is the one who brought it into Central Falls. She feels this system is invaluable in communicating with parents. At Barrows School, because she started using the system in the summertime and she was eager to get on board with the parents to make sure their children kept reading during the summer, she used the system to introduce herself. She sent it to their homes and to their cell

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phones in order to try the system out for the first time. The message was more effective on the cell phones because they were able to receive it through voice mail. She also sent it out for the Personal Literacy Plan to let the parents know the importance of keeping up the momentum that teachers and students were able to accomplish throughout the school year. When the students are in school, it is under the school's control, but in the summer they are under the parents' control. She used the system to let them know she had mailed something out to them. She also used it as a follow up because she allowed the students to meet with her every Tuesday to bring in their book summaries. She sent out a friendly reminder two weeks after the first message. She uses it now for PTO meetings as

well. The most important thing that any principal in a building can let them know is that this is a product. It is up to the principals to use this product in a way that will enhance their communication. There are things that she would not use Connect-Ed for, and there are times when it is a great product. This is very effective because one can craft their message and deliver it in such a way that one can communicate the sentiment behind it. She feels that it is a very effective tool and product. Mr. Jesse Leib, Vice President of Demand Services, was generous to provide it to Barrows so that Cranston could have an opportunity to see how it works.

Mrs. Greifer asked how much the system costs, if it was based on a flat rate or usage. Mr. Carter responded that there were two potential models for a district to adopt. Both are unlimited in use; both are based on student enrollment population which is direct pay of \$5.00 per student per year; there is an initial set up fee of \$1,000 for the district and \$100 per school building which includes the implementation, the data migration, training, and ongoing 24 x 7 ongoing support. If the district entered into a three-year agreement, they would lock in the \$5.00 cost, and they would waive the support fees in year two. The second option is called the Sponsor Package which is \$3.60 per student per year. The district can send out four types of messages, a single click survey, an emergency, attendance, and parental outreach. If the district goes the sponsor route, NTI as a corporation reserves the right to say to the school committee that they can consider a sponsorship from NIKE, General Foods, or IBM.



On the bottom as an annotation of any outreach message, it would say that this message is brought to you in academic partnership with IBM or with Apple. Mr. Carter went on to say that it has not been done in three years, but it does give their districts the lower rate. If the company were to do it, the school committee would approve it and has the right to say that none of the companies meet their standard and to try again. The district has the right at this time to go with the lower price plan. It is unlimited in use, so whether a district uses one message a year or thousands a year, there is no incremental cost on usage. There is no hardware or software to deal with or any phone lines other than the phone or cell phone used to create the pre-recorded message. In addition, the district is allowed to enter in their

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entire administration at no additional charge. This can be sub-grouped however they choose. It can call just the janitors in inclement weather asking them to begin sanding and sweeping. If there is a tragedy, the system can communicate with the entire teaching population that XYZ happened. A call can be made at home to cancel school due to inclement weather. Mr. Lupino stated that the faculty, administration and staff are at no extra charge, and Mr. Carter indicated that he was correct. Mr. Lupino asked when student head count is determined, and Mr. Carter responded that the district would declare their October 1st numbers. In the following year, if the

number of students drops, the next year's billing is amended to what that may be. If the district enters into a three-year agreement, it gives the district three net benefits. One is it locks the cost at \$3.60 for three years; secondly it waves the support fees in years two and three, and thirdly the district has the ability to opt out of the agreement with no issues and no penalties with a thirty-day notice prior to the end of any applicable terms.

Mrs. Greifer asked what the support fees would be in year two if the district didn't enter into a three-year contract. Mr. Carter responded that they would be \$1,000 and \$100 in year two support wise. Most districts do it as a three-year contract because it is a string of one-year agreements, because the district reserves the right to stop it. The district would get the price lock at \$3.60.

Mrs. Santa indicated that the list of disconnected numbers has been very valuable to her from a management standpoint. When these messages are finished being sent, the person receives a report e-mailed or one can log in and get it. This report states all of the phone numbers that are disconnected or no longer in service. That allows the school to get more current numbers. They will call the parent at work, and it is great to do this on a non-emergency basis because it was a general outreach message; and they were able to identify that some numbers were incorrect. The secretary would then get the correct numbers. The next time there is an emergency, those numbers would be correct. Every time a message is sent out, there

are less and less bad numbers every time. Their date is more accurate and up to date. It is a sense of comfort for her knowing that she had accurate numbers for her students.

Mr. Scherza commented that administration has examined the possibility of having this program grant funded totally, and they have identified a number of grant sources that could accommodate it. It is possible that it could be done without any charge to the school district's operating budget.

Mr. Traficante left the work session at 8:50 p.m.

Mr. Lupino added that beyond the cost of licensing, the plan, the installation, etc. is the personnel needed to initially input this information. He asked if this

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company offers the technology as opposed to having someone enter the phone numbers, etc. Mrs. Santa responded that it takes seconds to download this information from the district's database. Mr. Scherza added that the district's database is controlled by the district. Mr. Dillon controls the database, and everything that this company would get would be downloaded directly from Mr. Dillon. Mr. Lupino asked Mrs. Santa how the information she receives at her school gets to Mr. Dillon's office and who inputs that information.

**Mrs. Santa responded that the information is inputted from the student information system. That file, the student name, phone numbers for that student, are exported from one file and imported to the database in Briggs. Mr. Scherza explained that this information is already in the database in Briggs. This information can be downloaded from whatever is already there. The secretaries don't have to do one more key stroke than they have already done.**

**Mr. Scherza went on to say that if a phone number changes, this would alert the school, and they can identify those students who no longer live in Cranston. Mr. Lupino asked if there was any additional cost involved for personnel to implement the system. Mr. Scherza indicated that the only individual who has had to spend any amount of time on it is Joany Santa to make the call once. Mr. McManus explained further that it is all a part of the implementation setup. A date and time is set up with the implementation team to come in. They meet with administration, principals and whoever else will have an opportunity to use this product. When looking at the screen, the person will be seeing their data base. The data base will be connected to Connect-ED so that the information is live, and no one needs administrative assistance other than the principals learning how to use the product or whoever will have access to using the product. The person updates information every night because things change in the course of one day. Minutes of making a call, the person will have a report telling the effectiveness of making that call. This system will also identify redundant numbers where if there are**

two children in the school system, it won't make two calls; it will call only once. It will also indicate the percentage of calls that were delivered successfully and those that were not successful. By the click of a button, it will indicate which of those numbers were bad. Mrs. Santa indicated that this system dovetails nicely with school max because if she has a student in third grade who has a sibling in Park View and she finds out that their number is wrong, once the change is made in school max the change is made to Park View as well.

Mrs. Seal, Cranston Herald writer, asked if this system identifies wrong numbers that still pick up in voice mail. Mr. McManus responded that if a number is dialed and picked up by someone the district didn't want to call, it will show as a successful delivery because someone picked up that phone. Mrs. Santa explained that when the initial message is sent out, the sender has to say that if

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this isn't there number and this person doesn't have a child at Chester Barrows School to please call the school and that person will be removed from the data base. She has done this twice, once in the introduction and again further down in the message. She needs to know this youngster's true number. Mrs. Santa also noted that the students love to receive the messages at home. It is a great connector with the families.

**Mr. Lupino asked about notifying other entities other than the parents, staff, and students such as the police and fire departments alerting them that something is going to happen. The city administration could be included as well.**

**Mr. Stycos left the work session at 9:00 p.m.**

**Mr. Carter stated that the truancy or youth officers can be added to the mix. Many different communities do this to keep them informed. Other stakeholders can be added to the school district that are there. This company also has another product called Connect-CTY which is the same type of platform but focused more toward the business of a town or city for emergency management, police, fire and public health people. Mr. Lupino added that this district has community police officers at both of the high schools and they float between the middle schools. These officers have cell phones as well. Mr. Carter added that any stakeholders are classified as part of the administration. Mr. McManus indicated that the school committee could be added to the list as well. Mr. Lupino added that the secretary makes the phone calls manually indicating that a bus has been in an accident or something else of an emergency nature.**

**Mr. Carter went on to say that this system allows an administrator or a principal as they are exiting a building because of an emergency situation to dial the 800 number, type in their user ID, create the**

message on the fly and submit it to their group immediately. As an example, the water main broke, and 500 students were being moved to a remote location. He would tell the parents that if they are hearing it through the rumor mill the students are located in a certain place, and an update will be given in two hours. It can be done without the aid of a computer or an internet connection. The date and time of call can be set to dial out the call to the parents. The message is pre-recorded ahead of time. A courtesy call will be made to the person making the call to make sure it has gone out to everyone.

Mr. Scherza pointed out that he could see benefits for the classroom teachers. The classroom teacher can also notify parents that tomorrow there is a field trip. Mr. Lupino indicated that the big component is the cost and how the district would pay for it. He asked if the price would be locked in for three years and if there would be an escalation in price. It is \$3.60 now, and three years from now

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the district's funding source dries up, and now the cost is \$6.00. He asked if there is any continuation of service with regard to pricing. Mr. Carter said the district would lock in if they choose a three-year agreement, and they are assured of it for that period of time. In most cases, when districts role over from one year to three years and from one year to one year and from three years to three years, they are doing it at the same price points. He could not guarantee it four years

out, but he offered some historical data. Four years ago the price points were between \$7.95 and \$14.95 in a limited capacity so they have come down to meet a price point that allows for the best possible adoption regionally as well as nationally. If anything, the price points may stay the same, may have a slight COLA adjustment, or may come down slightly as the technology improves and as the distribution network improves. Historically over the past five years they have given the district the standpoint to say that they can have total cost of ownership on the solution at a fixed price based on the enrolled students. It is without other charges that are typically involved with hardware, software, phone lines, IT time, etc.

Mr. Scherza referred to Mr. Stycos's earlier comments regarding the system being used at Cranston East. He commented that this is limited to the number of phone lines at the school. Only two calls can be made at a time, and it would take a lot of time to call several hundred students. He asked how long it would take to call between 10,000 and 11,000 students in this district, and Mr. Carter responded that it would take less than ten minutes. Mr. Carter said that his company is becoming the experts nationwide where they have created best practices. This will give the best times to make calls along with the best scripts of what works the best and what are the things to avoid.

Mr. Lupino stated that the last component is getting the school committee to agree that this is something the district needs and how



it would be paid for. This job would fall on administration. He could see benefits in what spending \$3.60 would save the district.

Mrs. Greifer asked if they had anything in their presentation that would show how a sponsored message would work. Mr. Scherza indicated that he spoke with Mr. Leib, and he had indicated that the message would state as an example that “this message has been brought to you by Cranston Public Schools and IBM International.”

Mr. Carter told the committee that the school committee and district approve the exact language and approve the sponsor before it ever comes into play. Mrs. Greifer mentioned the law in Rhode Island regarding advertising in public schools. Mr. Scherza added that this question had been asked of the Commissioner of Education, and it was ironic that Central Falls, the first district to bring this into their system, is run by the State. Mr. Lupino asked if Central Falls has had a sponsored message, and Mr. Carter responded that no

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district in the nation has had a sponsored message. His company is reserving the right to do so that allows them to offer lower rates for the district to adopt. If it is in conflict with state, it won't happen. It is also a product that can be purchased through state contract from a procurement standpoint.

Mr. Carter discussed the reporting of analytics where the district can

watch where their trends are with regard to what types of message a school is sending plus the level of listening to the person receiving the call. It will indicate if the person is listening to half the message, one-quarter of the message, or three-quarters of the message. This will tell if the person sending the message has the right content or if there is the right trend to the person sending it out, and if there is a trend to the right length of the message. This would allow the district to modify some of their behaviors in communications.

Mr. Scherza commented that it costs 2.1 cents per copy on a copy machine, and the district send out reams of copies every day. This allows the district to electronically deal with issues, cut down on paper, and will cut down on the people having to do this work. Mr. Lupino added that the secretary spends a lot of time making phone calls to the committee members. This would allow her to send out a message and it will indicate what time the message was sent and what time it was received. It also sends e-mails. Mrs. Santa further explained that it is accessible from any website, and one needs a phone to record the message. One can log on at home for inclement weather announcements.

Mr. Scherza commented that the next step is for him to show the committee where the money would come from and that the district can afford it. Mr. Scherza asked that if the district were to enter into a contract this current year and the year is 50% over, would they pro-rate their costs. The fiscal year is July 1st through June 30th.

Mr. McManus responded that a standard contract is annual from the date the district signs the agreement until twelve months from that time. If the agreement were signed on December 15th this year, it would go until December 14th next year, year two, and then year three. Mr. Carter added that they could do it from December 15th until June 30th. Mrs. Greifer was concerned if they entered into a December contract and then the district loses its funding and would have to find a way to cover it. Mr. Scherza added that this is why the fiscal year is better. Mr. Carter said that they would run it from December 15th or January 1st to June 30th, but they would incorporate it with an agreement that would be another year or another three-year term beyond that. He suggested the three-year contract because the district would lose nothing in that right.

Mr. Scherza noted that there was a bomb scare at Cranston West last year. Students who had cell phones were calling their parents who in turn called in,

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and the district didn't have lines available to make calls. Mr. Lupino cited a bus trip coming back from New York in a snow storm. The students were on the bus calling their parents saying that they got into an accident and that the bus was about to roll over. None of this was true, and it would have been nice if the advisor or chaperone could have called into a system such as this one proposed. Mr.

**Lupino further noted that if the district were conducting a field trip of long duration, all of those contact numbers could be a subset and identified in their application for the field trip.**

**Because a quorum was not present at the end of this session, this meeting continued to the November 21, 2005 special meeting at which time the committee would adjourn this meeting.**

**This portion of the work session ended at 9:20 p.m.**

**Respectfully submitted,**

**Anthony J. Lupino  
Clerk**